Voices passed

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper's aim are to: review the value and credibility of oral history for historical research in marketing; and conceptualize oral history as more than a data source in historical research but also a subject to investigate memory and a conceptual approach for understanding historical events.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper comprises an international historical review of oral history theory and practice linked to an examination of oral history methods in marketing.

Findings – Oral history is perceived as an "essentially contested concept"; a lack of consensus on universal principles has been sustained over a long time and has led to incredible diversity in theory and practice but has also made it difficult to grasp and manage. It is shown to be perspectival with analytical reach beyond individuals' recollected experiences and actions. Memory is identified as the subject as well as the source for oral history and a misconception that oral history can provide literal expressions of what experience and events were like is clarified. Oral history has been under-utilized in marketing history and this is presented as a methodological paradox given the ubiquity of the interview in the marketing discipline more generally.

Originality/value – Central to oral history are a range of questions around issues of memory and remembering that have been largely unacknowledged in marketing and the oral history approach is perhaps uniquely placed to address some of these. Oral history critically examines the making of history and the paper highlights some of the issues this presents for historical research. Disciplinary efforts to standardize oral history are queried.

Keywords Oral history, Oral methods, Memory, Essentially contested concept, Research work, Marketing

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Oral history has a wide range of applications in studies of marketing, markets and the consumer. In technical terms, it is a method of gathering historical data, but it can also be approached as a subject matter through which to investigate memory (Frisch, 1990; Grele, 1985; Portelli, 1979; Thompson, 1981; Thompson, 1998), as well as a conceptual approach for understanding historical events (Okihiro, 1981). As a methodological approach, oral history shares much in common with many qualitative and interpretive approaches in marketing research which afford a certain centrality and priority to consumer voices and testimony (Elliott and Davies, 2006). As with data collection methods methodologies that involve personal interviews, focus groups and auto-driving (Heisley and Levy, 1991), for example, oral histories are premised on a belief that the articulations of market actors are an important and legitimate type of data. The voices of market actors are pervasive in marketing, both in terms of the common methods but also the centrality of the consumer respondent to marketing rhetoric. It is perhaps surprising that the voices of market actors are largely absent in historical marketing studies, revealing an interesting methodological paradox.

Oral histories offer the potential to compliment more prevalent approaches in historical marketing research that rely on artifact (e.g. Clampin, 2009; McFall, 2004; Marcellus, 2003; Walton, 1986; Witkowski, 2003; Witkowski, 2010), text analysis (e.g.

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Beard and Klyueva, 2010; Belk, 1992; Dixon, 2001; Martens and Scott, 2005; Petty, 2011) or the synthesis of historical writing (e.g. Beckman, 2011; Witkowski, 1989), revealing something of the inner thoughts, feelings, and reflections of marketing professionals and consumers. As we begin to examine oral history methods however, a number of problems soon arise. These include the veracity of accounts generated, the relative value of subjective accounts over other historical analysis, as well as differences between alternative types of oral history. Oral history has an extremely dense nomenclature, which can make it difficult to pin down. Bennett (1983) characterizes oral history as a terminological jungle. A wide range of descriptions are used and mixed to explain the approach, including life history, personal account, personal narrative, life story, testimony, memoir, street biography, personal biography, life narrative, traditionary evidence, experience narrative and orally-communicated history. While the value and credibility of the descriptive content generated from oral history remain open to disagreement and critique, this should not overshadow other areas of potential contribution. Central to oral history are a range of questions around issues of memory and remembering and the approach is perhaps uniquely placed to address some of these. Through oral history it becomes possible to gain insights into the ways that market actors construct and utilize both personal and collective memories and recollections. These can say much about the present production of marketing discourses and instructions through historical account.

Oral history is an under-utilized method in marketing history and the objective of this paper is to examine oral history as it has been used and situated in historical studies. The paper positions oral history as an "essentially contested concept" (Gallie, 1969). Oral history is characterized by a certain "unmanageability" similar to the way the consumer has been found to be unmanageable (Gabriel and Lang, 2008). In essence oral history is a site of research engagement where conflicting values and practices of interpretation have failed to achieve resolution; "there has been endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of users" (Gallie, 1969, p. 158). Oral history has defied attempts to be domesticated into a coherent, fixed and graspable set of theories, rules, and practices for historical enquiry. But this unmanageability should be perceived as a strength, rather than a limitation. It is "perspectival" (Moisander *et al.*, 2009) and flexible enough to strengthen our understanding of both method and subject in historical research.

The many histories of oral history

Oral history has many histories (Sharpless, 2006). Thompson (1998) urges us to examine the history of the field and the forces that have structured it. The recording of oral information – including eyewitness reports, memoirs and conversations – is hardly new and has been practiced by historians in various forms since ancient times (Hering, 2007; Starr, 1977; Thompson, 1978). Heredotus interviewed participants of events for his chronicles for example, and Thucydides interviewed eyewitnesses at the Polynesian War. More recently, eighteenth century antiquarians in Britain sent out queries to gather information including oral tradition; and nineteenth and early twentieth century regional, local and family historians in the USA interviewed local townspeople to capture a genealogical record of tradition. Contemporary oral history in the USA is often attributed to Alan Nevins and Columbia University whose interviews with white male elites in the late 1940s has been adopted by business historians

interested in the emergence of corporate identity (Perks, 2010). In Britain oral history gained new popularity in the 1950s and 60s as part of a broader social and political commitment (Perks, 2010; Thompson, 1998). Democratic history writing, or "history from below", sought to capture the testimonies of "ordinary" working people and to put on record the undocumented or ill-recorded. This represented an attempt to redress a perceived "bias" in historical analysis, in which the actions and events of elites were seen as over-represented. However, care is needed in assuming that oral history has existed as anything like a unified movement that holds a graspable trajectory of development (Gluck, 1999; Hering, 2007; Perks, 2010) and until the late 1970s oral historians worked largely independently and in isolation (Grele, 2008; Thompson, 1998; Thomson, 2006).

Problems of definition

The term oral history began to be used occasionally from the middle of the nineteenth century to refer to "the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction" (Grele, 1996, p. 63). Morrissey (1980) identified the first recorded use of the term by Watson in 1863, but this has subsequently been disputed by Paul Thompson who alternatively identifies Samuel Johnson's remark, "You are to consider all history was first oral" as an earlier cite (Morrissey, 1984, p. 18)[1]. Efforts to locate the first use of the term is peculiar given that even a casual review of oral history reveals a myriad of terms which all locate historical enquiry using the interview as social data. Life history, retrospective, personal narrative, life story, personal testimony, memoir, street biography, personal biography, life narrative, dictations, traditionary evidence (Hering, 2007), experience narrative (Schrager, 1983) and orally communicated history (Allen and Montell, 1981) are some of the possibly 100 or so (Morrissey, 1984) terms to locate oral-based historical enquiry. Asking whether oral history should remedy this inconsistency in terminology, Bennett (1983) views this "formlessness" as unsurprising for a field that "seeks to capture human life in all its chaotic variety" (Bennett, 1983, p. 14) and Henige (1982) sees formlessness as unavoidable.

Starr (1971) calls oral history a "troublesome term in itself – a misnomer like social security. The end product is not oral; it is not history" (p. 276). Revisiting this comment later, he added that it was "hopelessly embedded in our language" (Starr, 1974, p. 1), calling for an end to the on-going debates as to whether the term captured the activity and scope of the field and could be meaningful revised to aural, living history, or oral documentation. His resigned conclusion, in agreement with Cutler (1969), was that the term had become generic and was thus unchangeable.

The lack of consensus in naming and locating oral history reflects tremendous diversity in the scope and practice of oral history, but is also misleading (Coleman, 1967) and imprecise (Starr, 1967). Thompson (1978) reasons that the difficulty in locating oral history is because oral historians are "uncategorizable individuals" (Thompson, 1978, p. 225). This is borne out by the considerable variety in published oral history that can be found within, as well as between, the four "phases" or themes in the history of contemporary oral history identified by Gluck (1999) and Thomson (2006). Both place emphasis on the diversity in topic, methodological approach, research practice and research audiences. Thomson (2006) locates these as paradigms. Gluck (1999) identifies them by the generations of practitioners who entered the field at

different time points. The themes Thompson and Gluck report include the postwar renaissance in peoples' history and a search for scientific objectivity; a move towards post-positive research approaches in the 1970s and 1980s; theoretical sophistication and a consideration of the roles of interviewer and analyst in the late 1980s and 1990s; and digital media and the voices of the interviewee narrator at the turn of the millennium. Gluck (1999) is sensitive to the usual problems of periodization that could be taken from this type approach. She repeatedly notes how the contrasting work and interests of four generations of oral historians seemingly co-exist. The ideas and work of one generation have not been replaced by the next, and her analysis is sensitive to the unresolved differences within generations. Thomson (2006) is less clear on the status of new developments in oral history. Choosing to capture the four themes using the term "paradigm" suggests a progressive trajectory but this is something that remains ambiguous. Oral history it would seem is "mulish … stubbornly it resists a unifying terminology" (Morrissey, 1984, p. 1), and significantly it seems to have defied attempts to be fixed. The common denominator, it might seem reasonable to suggest, is using the interview to drive historical enquiry.

Revealing the oral history interview

The formal interview became an essential component of making oral history in the 1860s, concurrent with early moves to journalistic interviewing. With this there was a change in scale in oral history to collect and archive large amounts of information, reflecting early attempts to professionalize and standardize practice in the latter decades of the nineteenth century (Hering, 2007). However, the development of history as an academic subject in the late nineteenth century also saw oral evidence marginalized and primacy given to archival sources and documentary evidence (Perks, 2010; Thompson, 2000). One reason given to explain this disciplinary preference was an assumed association with folklore studies and family history (Perks, 2010; Thompson, 1998). Core criticisms levied against oral history related to effects on memory that would bias the telling of events, experiences and fact. These include the physical deterioration and nostalgia in old age, the influence of collective and retrospective accounts of the past, and the concerns of personal bias by interviewer or interviewee (Thomson, 2006).

Oral history held a contested position within historiography until the late seventies when the work of Paul Thompson in the UK and Michael Frisch in the USA saw a renaissance in memory as an historical source (Gluck, 1999; Thomson, 2006). Oral historians have continued to defend their value to history by reminding historians that there is subjectivity in archived documents. Such sources have no greater access to "truth" and are themselves products of selective perception, hidden agendas and also selective preservation (Witkowski and Jones, 2006). Increasing acceptance of oral enquiry came about as oral historians moved away from defending "objectivity" (Gluck, 1999) although practicing oral historians can still be seen to feel on the margins (Perks, 2010).

Integrating and evaluating what the interview method brings to history remains a fundamental enterprise for oral historians, and this has lead to theoretical advances that are not well understood outside of oral history. As oral historians have distanced themselves from claims about the authenticity and "reality" of past events, they have become more secure in their contribution to historical enquiry. Oral historians have

moved from defending oral recollections as the subjective perception of facts, to a position where memory, narrative and intentionality are seen as unique "resources" (Portelli, 1979). Central to this re-positioning of oral history is a clarification that it is not experience, but the memory of that experience that is captured in the interview (Alexander, 2009). Interviewee-narrators tell stories about their lives and do so in ways that give them social meaning. Portelli (1997) stresses that story telling implicates reflection and interpretation, "there can be no narration without interpretation" (p. 80). Meaning is articulated in the memory of experience and this has made memory the subject and source in oral history (Frisch, 1990; Grele, 1985; Portelli, 1979; Thompson, 2006).

The different credibility of memory

Memory is recognized as a constructive process with likely errors, distortions and illusions, and so can never be viewed as a literal reproduction of the past. The details that do come through the lens of memory reveal the significance and understandings taken from experience (Mears, 2008). They reveal less about events and more about their meaning (Portelli, 1997). The interview records what an informant has chosen for inclusion and what has been omitted, and in so doing shows how individuals take and make meaning from events and objects in a way that has fashioned their present and will likely also fashion their futures. It is likely that the reflections of interview-narrators on the past are practiced, revised and edited (Hirsch and Dixon, 2008). Portelli (1997) explains that "the motivation for telling the facts is in most cases the desire to formulate a philosophy", the desire to become "interpreter rather than datum, 'philosopher ' rather than ' fact'"(Portelli, 1997, p. 88). Stories reveal how people have made sense of their past, how their experience is connected to its social context and how the past becomes part of the present. This is perhaps why interviewee-narrators often concentrate on the everyday and ordinary rather than structuring their reflections by their main achievements, the exotic, or celebrated events (Hering, 2007; Lyman, 2009). Memory affords a perspective on the past framed from the present, offering "prisms on the past rather than windows" (Henige, 1982, p. 33). What oral history does not pretend to do is to offer the "prequel", something Alexander (2010) identifies as an objective of historical method when studying retail history. Oral history because it views the past through memory acknowledges that you can never write about the past framed only within the conditions of the past.

There is a reflective distance in recounting memories because interviewee-narrators are divorced in time from the emotional intensities, popular ideologies and audiences of the past. They can be more candid in their observations of the past, and may also have more desire to remember (Thompson, 2006). This reflective or interpretive distance embeds past events and experiences in the social and cultural context of the present. Thompson (1975, p. 299) argues that historical change is "the aggregate of small private decisions" and oral history is uniquely positioned to capture these micro-practices, as our memories drop events and details over time. Distorting and forgetting, or a factual wrong, offer forms of evidence about the past and its influence on the present (Kirby, 2008; Thompson, 2009). Life stories are rarely vocalized in a systematic time or subject trajectory and instead are reported in fragments (Portelli, 1997). Interview-narrators report that they often see their fragmented recollection for the first time as a meaningful whole (re)affirming the therapeutic dimension of oral

history (McCarthy, 2010). Oral history has an impressive record to change lives through therapeutic and advocacy work and oral history would seem to sit easily with the ambitions of transformative consumer research (Mick, 2006; Mick *et al.*, 2011). Oral history can potentially raise consumer consciousness and offer empancipatory and therapeutic benefits.

A shared authority on culture

Grele (1985) reminds that "if we fail to see our interviewees as bearers of a culture and thus people with their own view of the past, be it formed as part of a hegemonic ideology, or in opposition to that ideology, or as some combination of myth and ideology, or even a secret history, we will . . . infuse our own vision of the past" (p. 133). Memories depend, not only on an individual's comprehension, but also on the interviewee-narrators interest, group consciousness and wanting to remember (Portelli, 1997; Thompson, 2000). Memory is re-conceptualized as layered (Kirby, 2008; Thompson, 2009) and to understand the subtleties of layers within memory is to fathom how individual stories are both universal and unique.

The work of Portelli (1991, 1997, 2003), Passerini (1979a, 2003) and Thompson (1975) lead the way for oral historians to show how conscious and unconscious meanings can be revealed from an analysis that explores disjuncture in layers of memory. Passerini (1979b) studied Italian memories of Benito Mussolini's interwar Fascist regime analyzing the silences and inconsistencies in Italian working-class memories to show how Fascist ideology had become part of everyday life and personal identity. Portelli (2003) examined the Nazi massacre of unarmed civilians in Rome and his analysis reveals the collective or public memory of the event that continues to have an influence on Italian politics and historical consciousness. Portelli also shows that there is individual and group trauma that has been hidden in history and that there is always a battle over memory. These oral historians demonstrated not only how experience is remembered, but how public culture and ideology becomes visible in individual memory in the silences, discrepancies, idiosyncrasies and factual errors of personal testimony (Thomson, 2006). Interviewee-narrators who are reticent or enigmatic when asked certain questions "force us to reformulate problems and challenge our current habits of thought" (Passerini, 1979a, p. 91).

Olick (1999) describes collective memory as being underpinned by "powerful institutions [which] clearly value some histories more than others, [and] provide narrative patterns and exemplars of how individuals can and should remember" (p. 11). Interviewee narrators whose memory of the experience differs from public memory or official history may fall reticent and fear disapproval. There are fears of not being believed and a desire not to want to appear offensive or because it might erode acceptability (Lyman, 2009; Wilton, 1994). Lyman (2009) stresses the interpretive value in analyzing reticence, which she argues serves to enlarge the interpretive frame. Quite reasonably there is a need to learn to listen (Anderson and Jack, 2006) so as to hear about experiences, which lie outside the bounds of acceptability. If this is achieved repetitions and patterns can be revealed when looking across several life reviews and these, Lyman (2009) demonstrates, are an expression of group identity that reveal a community memory.

Alexander (2009) and Koleva (2009) go beyond the layers of individual, collective (public) and community memory. Looking at generation and family systems theories

they add generational memory as a further layer in memory where insight can be gained. Koleva (2009) shows how personal and collective memory across three generations in a Bulgarian-Jewish family reveals intergenerational transmission and rejection of Jewish identity, but also and importantly, how personal consciousness can be (re)shaped by shifting phases in political and social attitudes and collective memory. When reviewed for interlocking themes and disconnections across two or more generations, the family story can reveal how individual life stories intersect with social structures, cultural myth, religion and historical change by illuminating the individual as he or she is positioned within generational memory. Koleva (2009) concludes that family and generational memory are intermediate layers between personal recollections and collective memory of the wider Jewish community in Bulgaria.

Alexander (2009) provides another example of enquiry forged on generational memory, exploring gender by looking at her own, her daughter's and granddaughter's life histories. Her analysis shows how generational memory reveals the different social and political structures that give each woman a different position in their family (generational) memory. Individual memories interact with more than collective (public), community (group) and generational (family) memory. She demonstrates how myth may also weave with individual memory, and shows the possible fluidity between myth and experience as individuals (especially children) mix them in seeking to interpret their worlds. Thompson (2009) sees that there remains a preoccupation with collective memory, and oral historians have so far not fully explored how people use myth in their individual memories; accepting or rejecting or selecting to make sense of their own lives. We "need to consider myth and memory, not only as special clues to the past, but equally as windows on the making and remaking of individual and collective consciousness in which both fact and fantasy, past and present, each has its part . . . to the possibility of a better understanding of a continuing struggle over the past" (Samuel and Thompson, 1990, p. 21). Burchardt (1990) examined how stepchildren use the myth of the wicked stepmother and how this shapes both the memories of parents and step children. Burchardt (1990) cautions that we should not over emphasize the power of myth to prefigure memory, experience or action, finding personal experiences often negate myth and take the story in unexpected directions. The work of oral historians who have sought to work with layers of memory is perhaps most enthralling for its vigilance in discerning the meaning that can be found between the layers of memory. Insights from these oral histories speak to many of the same concerns of Moisander *et al.* (2009), who have recently called for the interview to be viewed as a "cultural text" in consumer research. Oral historians extend this by explicitly recognizing that experiences reported in interview and the interview itself are produced and articulated within frames or layers of memory.

In exploring the individual, collective, community, generational and myth in memory, oral historians confront the subjectivity of history head-on. They have shown that oral history is a "powerful tool for discovering, exploring and evaluating the nature of the *process* of historical memory" (Frisch 1990, p. 188, italics added), and that interviewee-narrators are pivotal in connecting "life and times" with the genre of history telling (Portelli, 1997). Lyman's (2009) study of the power station is a contemporary example of the "secrets, lies and misremembering" (Polishuk, 1998, 2005), or "fozzilised lies" to which oral history can marshal real voices as witness (Blight, 2005). They expose that remembering for the interviewee-narrator is not

always therapeutic or empowering in a straightforward sense. Remembering can also inflict pain and discomfort, especially if interviewee-narrators view themselves in an altered and new perspective or are speaking about a discredited regime or unfashionable idea (Lyman, 2009; Passerini, 1979a; Perks, 1993; Portelli, 2003; Sherbakova, 2006). A product of such enquiries has been to query appropriate forms of historical and commemorative redress but they also present a challenge to oral historians who can no longer uncritically assume that their work can bring only democratic returns for interviewee-narrators. Oral historians have begun to acknowledge their moral agency in working with interviewee-narrators who themselves have a desire to construct a celebratory, uncritical history of "the good old days" (Lyman, 2009).

Human relationships in historical enquiry

Oral history is unique in historiography by being the only form of enquiry that requires the historian to engage individuals directly in talk rather than analyze archived text or artifact. Grele (1985) described the interview as a "conversational narrative" recognizing that the narratives are shaped by both interviewer and interviewee, as it were, with "two captains at the helm" (Hirsch and Dixon, 2008) with "shared authority" (Frisch, 1990). Rather than an interviewer prompting an autobiography, the interview is positioned as a co-created product, a collaboration, produced via the interaction of informant and interviewer. It is looser, more akin to an exploratory dialogue and crucially one where both parties ideally are considered experts at their craft (Hirsch and Dixon, 2008). This live interaction between historian and subject denotes a democratic shift away from the traditional role of the historian as gatekeeper (Frisch, 1990). Oral historians view oral history as a dialogic discourse (Portelli, 1997), one that is created by what interviewees say, but also by what historians do, the historian's presence and actions in the field, and their presentation and writing. The theoretical and practical challenges of seeing oral history in dialogical terms has generated debate and re-thinking of theory and practice.

Many oral historians have concluded that it is impossible to follow a single set of techniques, or rules, for interviewing and no longer seek to legitimize oral history by advocating a "scientific" model for the research interview as suggested by early handbooks (Thompson, 1998). There is no universal or right way to do oral history (Bozzoli, 2006; Minister, 1991; Morrissey, 1998, Thompson, 1998; Slim *et al.*, 2006). The core motivation for resisting prescription and not seeking to tame the interview method is the recognition of interview as embedded in cultural practice and informed by culturally specific systems and relations in communication (Thompson, 1998). As such the turn taking practices of interviewing elite white western males are not likely to be appropriate for interviewing in non-western context (Slim *et al.*, 2006; Wilton, 1994). Storytelling may have a designated season (Thompson, 1998), may require the presence of an insider (Bozzoli, 2006; Kikumura, 1998), or be better achieved through group interviewing to foster a familiar conversational style and context for women (Minister, 1991). It is necessary to attend to the "communicative repertoire" (Briggs, cited in Thompson, 1998) so as to be sensitive to forms of speech, special events, speech categories and taboos, allowing people to speak on their own terms to generate more effective communication and storytelling. The interviewer needs to show an interest in the stories told, not to debate and discuss but to bring empathy, sensitivity and

subtleness to get the story behind the story (Ester, 2008). It also recognizes that the interview reveals what is acceptable and what is not. For example, Ryan (2009) demonstrates how women serving in the Navy and Coast Guard during the Second World War repeatedly said "I didn't do anything important." They did not intend to devalue their contribution, but were speaking to acknowledge society's expectations.

Oral history is a story written about the interviewee-narrator's words and material position but is told by the researcher-historian. Commenting on the practice of oral history in the 1970s Bornat (1998) remarks "too many of us saw the interview as just another source of evidence to be extracted . . . It was well-intentioned but with one aim in mind: the eliciting of 'usable' material. Inevitably, it was the interviewee who reminded the historian that this was a shared experience" (p. 191). A focus on the human relationship in oral history has lead to consideration of the consequences of remembering for the narrator and re-thinking about what is produced from the oral history. Stearns (1998) answers the question of whose story is written to conclude that it is a story in-between requiring the researcher-historian to continuously deconstruct the power relations of the interview relationship to stop them from "solidifying" and becoming invisible, unacknowledged and not open for critical scrutiny (Scott, 1988; Stearns, 1998). She explains that oral history is "made possible by the meeting of these particular persons and cultural positioning … this text is created in the *territory between cultures*" (p. 68, italics added). Understanding oral history in these terms queries whether politically orientated micro-history can ever fully "give voice" to the interviewee-narrator because even history from below is framed with the researcher in editorial role with the power to shape and not just record.

In an attempt not to erase the interviewee-narrator, oral historians are sensitive to afford them a protected space, but this has been at the expense of not recognizing the narrator's moral agency (Stearns, 1998; Scott, 1988). In a case example, Stearns (1998) illustrates the subtle ways in which an interviewee-narrator asserts moral agency and how this impacts the research, as well as the researcher. She explains that interviewee-narrators consciously present their lives situated from their own class and culture that have their own forms of resistance. In unearthing the narrator's subtle resistance as a form of moral-agency Stearns (1998) demonstrates that what emerges from the oral history interview is a "positioned meaning" with the life history text alien from the research motivation at the outset of a study. Stearns concludes "what emerges in the end is positioned meaning, the researcher and research questions shift, just as the subject can never be the same after enduring this public probing of her life" (Stearns, 1998, p. 68). Such appreciation of positioned meaning resonates and expands the conceptual and practical insights from studying reticence by asking oral historians to articulate and make visible the ways in which interviewees make moral choices for the diversions (Hirsch and Dixon, 2008; Mears, 2008,) and amazing stories (Lyman, 2009) that can unfold. But when a positioned meaning cannot be secured (there is no agreed interpretation), as in the case of Blee's (2006) study of women in the Klu Klux Klan, oral historians face a dilemma and must choose between their responsibility to their interviewee-narrators and their responsibility to history and society (Thompson, 1998). Thompson concludes that to recognize and negotiate these dilemmas enables the oral historian to consider more fully the personal and political consequences of historical research. It is in this vein that he continues to argue for oral history to be seen

as more than a research methodology, but also as advocacy and empowerment with a renewed understanding of responsibilities and consequence.

Oral histories vary in the extent to which the original expressions of the interviewee-narrator are presented. Oral historians typically write in the first person revealing themselves as editor-narrator. Verbatim expressions are used as quotes to illuminate the analysis, which may also draw on other historical sources (for examples see Ester, 2008; Koleva, 2009; Lyman, 2009; Roberts, 1995; Thompson, 1975). In some oral histories the stories told by the interview-narrator are channeled more or less exclusively through the expressions of the oral historian (for examples see Alexander, 2009; Seng, 2009). Oral historians are experimenting with modes of representation including multi-voice texts (Portelli, 1997, 2003), poetry (Mears, 2008), film, dramatic performance multi-media and the web (for a review see Perks and Thompson, 1998, 2006). Mears' (2008) Gateway approach is a contemporary example that presents in poetic form only interview-narrators words. She argues that this enables the findings to "emerge from the narrative since it (the narrative) tells the story rather than the oral historian telling about the story." The sense here is to retain the integrity of the interviewee-narrator subject. The approach is compelling and emotionally-vivid in presenting the voices of parents who lost children in the Columbine shootings and as broader analysis of trauma. It seems, however, to raise the question of whether the poetic form explicitly acknowledges the oral historian's role to shape the story or whether giving the text over totally to the verbatim expressions deludes the reader into seeing the oral historian as neutral. Seeking to acknowledge the power and authority of the oral-historian and also to put on public record the voices and expressions of individuals' recollections is an on-going tension among oral historians. Some oral historians question the increasing theoretical sophistication in oral history analysis querying whether a disembodiment of the oral history text has marginalized the interviewee-narrator and oral historians who work outside the academy in community and health care (Gluck, 1999). It brings to the forefront concern for the aurality or orality in the field. Frisch (2006) argues that the increasing ease and skill of researchers to digitize sound and image challenges the dominance of transcription and could return aurality to oral history. This is indeed an interesting proposition, but one that needs to re-consider the explicit presence and stewardship of the oral historian. Oral historians remain divided on the ethics of self-navigating multi-media aural archives on the web (Flick and Goodall, 1996; Thompson, 1998).

Concluding reflections on oral history in marketing

Oral history may be an "essentially contested concept", similar to the way that Gabriel and Lang (2008) have positioned the consumer. Oral history has seemingly resisted attempts to be tamed into a coherent, fixed and graspable set of theories, rules and practice for historical enquiry. Attempts to tame its unmanageability in nomenclature or methodology have failed. Oral historians have concluded that these attempts have not clarified but rather made oral history ever more elusive.

For marketing enquires both historical and contemporary, oral history as a contested concept offers a rich repository to draw on and at the same time it is able to offer a mirror so that we can critically review our methods and our making of history. A review of oral history makes explicit some of the working assumptions in our common methods that we unquestionably accept. For contemporary interview-based

methods, oral history makes explicit the advantages and concerns about memory. It is memory of experience, rather than a literal expression of lived experience that is captured in the interview. Attending to memory oral history helps us to view how individuals recontextualize their experiences and in so doing reveal the priorities, assumptions and dynamics of recollected experiences as manifest artifacts of cultural discourse. It recognizes that the meaning individuals take from experience constitute their social reality, as well as represent that reality, and reminds us that historical change comes from mirco-practices of the everyday. Oral historians exposition of collective (public), family, and individual memory have re-positioned the interview as a text and the analysis in this paper shows that the oral history interview holds much in common with Moisander *et al.*'s (2009) "cultural text" in consumer research. The analytic focus of oral history should not be misunderstood as an attention to the individual. Rather, the analytical frame of many oral historians has been to reveal cultural discourse by seeking out the artifacts of discourse as they are storied in people's lives. They have also sought out the small shifts in discourse as they appear from different generations and over time.

Oral history remains cognizant and critically orientated to question and challenge what history is being written and what is not. It asks at a fairly basic level who is included and who is excluded from our historical understanding. The diversity in scope of oral history reminds us that we must be vigilant in making and archiving marketing history to document our subject widely. In marketing there is an extensive record of contemporary consumer voices, but very little is known about the experiences, thoughts and reflections of consumers about their pasts (Elliott and Davies, 2006; Witkowski and Jones, 2006). Witkowski and Jones (2006) remind us that we cannot interview the dead, and this emphasizes that in marketing we need to capture the recollections of the past from individuals before they are lost. Oral history written from archives (for example, Hill *et al.*, 1997) offers an opportunity for the voices of market actors recorded in the past to be re-interpreted in present, and re-interpreted in the future (Elliott and Davies, 2006). Oral history reminds us of the need to collate and archive the voices of a variety of market actors.

There has been some limited use of oral history in marketing, but with the exception of Witkowski and Jones (2006) and Gebhardt *et al.* (2006) these studies have exclusively had a consumer focus (Alexander *et al.*, 2008; Alexander *et al.*, 2009; Bailey *et al.*, 2010; Davies and Elliott, 2006; Harrison *et al.*, 2011; Hill *et al.*, 1997; Löfgren, 1998; Jackson *et al.*, 2006). In oral histories in there has been only a cursory exploration of memory, and in particular how individual accounts can reveal the artifacts of discourse, and how this changes over time. These first oral histories in marketing offer examples on which there are many opportunities for further work to expand. But they also expose how little is known about the everyday and perhaps unremarkable acts and experiences of marketing practitioners. The voices and testimonies of middlemen, salespeople, store owners, project managers, brand consultants, advertising agency workers, market researchers, market entrepreneurs, workers in market regulation or advisory institutions, or supermarket managers, for example, may provide a range of valuable insights into the emergence of marketing institutions in the twentieth century. These testimonies can add and contextualize our theories of marketing, bringing to them the reflections and memories of everyday practices that are not recorded in the archived documents of industry or academic sources. Perks (2010) argues that oral

history can help to assess "big ideas" of business and in marketing we could envisage consumer and/or practitioners oral histories on, for example, technology (including retail technology), supply chain relationships, retailing formats, consumer scepticism, marketing orientation, advertising persuasion, brand consciousness, market myths, inter-generational influences, consumer sovereignty, frugality, hedonism, market morality, and consumerism.

US corporations have collated historical biography to manage their corporate identity and heritage, but business historians in the UK have been wary of this subject area (Perks, 2010). In terms of the elite, work has begun to capture the testimony of great scholars, those who worked with them or were their students (for example, Hollander, 1995; Jones and Keep, 2009; Nason, 2009). Oral history applied in this vein offers the potential to enlarge our understanding of the history of marketing thought by recording the memories and reflections of individuals about those theories that have shaped our discipline. In some small way, oral history might be capable to bridge the history of marketing with the history of marketing thought.

To recognize that oral methods have been neglected in historical marketing research reveals an interesting methodological paradox where the voices of market actors represent the everyday in both the practice of marketing and also academic enquiry. Oral history it would seem offers the potential to unravel or redress this paradox, bringing to our understanding of marketing history the inner thoughts and feelings, and reflections of consumers and marketing practitioners, importantly before these are lost. Marketing history also holds the potential to bring a critical understanding of the interview, a ubiquitous method in marketing. Oral histories of marketing will expose assumptions made about interview data; methods framed on memory and recall are unable to reflect the past but rather are a refraction of the past framed in the present.

Note

1. Morrissey (1984) does not accept this and has not awarded the Winslow C. Watson award to Thompson for finding a cite to predate Watson 1863.

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